

2.1 PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide a modern transportation facility from Interstate 474 (I-474) west of Peoria, Illinois to the eastern side of Macomb, Illinois. The proposed action is one of a series of actions providing western Illinois and the communities of Jacksonville, Quincy, Monmouth, Macomb, Canton, and Peoria greater access to each other and to various east/west and north/south interstate and expressway systems.

2.2 NEED FOR ACTION

This project is based on the need for improvement of system linkage, economic stability, and travel efficiency.

2.2.1 System Linkage

The proposed project will improve regional transportation continuity and enhance the linkage of west-central Illinois to major economic markets. This project, while having independent utility, is a key link to the following four-lane highway improvements in west-central Illinois that are either existing, under construction, or proposed (Exhibit 2-1):

U.S. Route 67, Macomb to Monmouth (Exhibit 2-1, Section 1): Construction of this four-lane expressway was completed in 2002.

U.S. Route 67, Macomb to Alton (Exhibit 2-1, Section 2): All studies on this project are completed and approved, and design approval for a four-lane expressway between Macomb and Jacksonville was granted in 2003. A U.S. Route 67 bypass of Jacksonville was completed and opened to traffic in 1999. The Jacksonville Bypass connects to I-72 and a section of US 67, which is scheduled for completion in 2004, that extends from I-72 south to Manchester. U.S. Route 67 extends south of Manchester to Alton. This improvement will be constructed in sections as funding becomes available.

IL Route 336, Quincy to Macomb (Exhibit 2-1, Section 3): Currently IL 336 is built and open to traffic from Quincy to one mile north of IL 94 (West Point Road, approximately 11 miles south of Carthage). The section from one mile north of IL 94 to 3 miles south of Carthage is currently under construction. A four-lane expressway from south of Carthage to the west edge of Macomb is currently under design.

IL Route 336/U.S. Route 67, Macomb Area Study (Exhibit 2-1, Section 4): IDOT is currently conducting a study for a four-lane freeway around the north side of Macomb, which would connect all of the above three projects (shown as Sections 1, 2, and 3 on Exhibit 2-1).

The connection between Macomb and Peoria combined with the other four-lane facilities would provide an important link in the regional transportation system. Via I-474, Quincy, Macomb,

Canton, and smaller communities would have four-lane access eastward to I-74, I-155, I-55, and I-39. This regional link would also provide an important connection between central Illinois towns and markets in western Illinois and in Missouri. This regional link would serve present and future travel needs and complete the highway network.

2.2.2 Economic Stability

The proposed project is necessary to maintain the regional economic viability of west-central Illinois. An essential attribute of any region's economic viability is adequate access. A good, safe, and efficient highway system is especially important in this region as rural areas are almost solely dependent on the highway system to meet the needs for agriculture, industry, and commerce.

Within the project area, Fulton and McDonough Counties lag behind most of the rest of the state in economic viability. One of the main concerns in each county is economic stagnation and decline. Both counties seek to arrest further population declines and at a minimum maintain existing economic conditions.

Population. McDonough County's population declined by 6.6% between 1990 and 2000. This represents the fourth-greatest population decline of all counties in the state (State of Illinois website, 2003). While Fulton and Peoria counties showed slight increases in population between 1990 and 2000 (0.3% and 0.4% respectively), those increases are significantly below the state average of 8.6%. Current population projections for Fulton County indicate a net decrease over the next 18 years of 7.2% (Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs website, 2003).

Of all the municipalities in the study area, only Bartonville, Bellevue, and Canton increased in population from 1990-2000. The City of Canton grew by 1,300 people between 1990 and 2000. The City of Peoria lost approximately 600 residents during the decade.

Employment. Fulton, McDonough, and Peoria County's existing economic base will strengthen by improved four-lane road access. Major employers in the project area include:

500+ Employees

Caterpillar – Mapleton Plant

Keystone Steel and Wire, Bartonville

USPS Remote Encoding Center, Bartonville

Western Illinois University, Macomb

250 – 500 Employees

Degussa Goldschmidt, Mapleton

Graham Hospital, Canton

Illinois River Correctional Center, Canton

Spoon River College, Canton

Other Large Employers

Central Illinois Energy (proposed ethanol plant), Canton

Sodexo Marriott, Macomb

Vaughan & Bushnell, Bushnell

Fulton County experienced an employment decline of 351 jobs between 1997 and 2000. Employment in McDonough and Peoria Counties increased slightly by 383 jobs in Peoria and 44 jobs in McDonough. This modest job growth occurred during an economic expansion when 268,000 jobs were added within the state of Illinois. Peoria and McDonough Counties unemployment rates of 6.7% and 7.2% are above the state average of 6.3% (Illinois Department of Employment Security website, on 03-24-03).

The 11.9% unemployment rate of Fulton County is 47% above the state average. In 1983, 2,000 manufacturing jobs were lost when International Harvester closed. This loss was followed by a significant loss of mining jobs. Between 1980 and 2002, manufacturing employment had dropped 76%. During that same time in Fulton County, 94% of the people who had worked in the mining industry lost their jobs.

According to the 2000 Census, 42.5% of the employed people in Fulton County need to travel outside the county for work. This is significantly higher than the state rate of 25.2% of people commuting outside of their county of residence for employment. While the percentage of people in McDonough County commuting to other counties for employment is currently below the state average, it has doubled since the 1990 census. In addition to increased mobility, the proposed improvement would increase the range of possible employment opportunities.

Income. Median household incomes for McDonough (\$32,141) and Fulton (\$33,952) counties are 31% and 27% below the state average of \$46,590, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000). Over 19% of the population in McDonough County had income below the poverty level in 2000, compared to the statewide level of 10.7%.

2.2.2.1 Regional Outlook

The creation of a four-lane road through Fulton County is essential for the long-term survival of the communities. The area is currently disconnected from the larger central Illinois community because of lack of access.

Without increased ability to get goods to market in a timely, cost-effective manner, increased manufacturing employment is unobtainable. The county is currently missing opportunities to recruit manufacturing and warehouse/distribution plant expansions due to lack of road access.

Job creation and retention in McDonough County, particularly in Macomb, is a major priority of local and regional economic development agencies. The region is experiencing a shift from industrial development, due to the trend toward greater globalization, to general economic

development. In the future there will be a greater emphasis on distribution if the needed transportation components are available. Improved road access would create opportunities to expand programming held at Western Illinois University, such as conferences and cultural events.

The Western Illinois Regional Council (Council), the regional planning council for McDonough and Fulton Counties sees the establishment of IL 336 as a vital transportation link in western Illinois. The Council views the establishment of improved linkages in the area as important for future development.

McDonough County, Fulton County, and the City of Macomb have all developed plans that point to transportation as an important factor in economic development and have set transportation-related goals. For example, the first goal of the McDonough County plan is to promote and assist in the development of an improved highway system in McDonough County and all of western Illinois. The Fulton County plan describes the inadequate highway system and the need for a coordinated effort to build a modern 4-lane highway in Fulton County.

All these plans focus on the need for improved transportation to stem decline in businesses, population, and income within the study area. While many factors affect economic conditions, studies have shown transportation is key to economic stability in areas that are largely rural, such as this study area (Stommes et al, 2002; Crane et al, 1993). Transportation serves a critical role in rural areas by providing access to market, both input and output, especially in the movement of agricultural products, and by providing access for rural residents to jobs and services. It has been shown that rural transportation investment has a positive economic impact on both farm and non-farm incomes (Crane et al, 1993). A significant, positive relationship exists between economic stability and access to interstates or other major highways (Kusmin et al, 1996; Brown, 1999).

Further, in areas such as the study area, where transportation infrastructure is inadequate, but other economic factors are well developed (i.e., good public education expenditures, economic incentive programs, high quality labor force, solid working relationships between industry and government), transportation becomes key to the prevention of economic decline (Aldrich et al, 1997).

2.2.3 Travel Efficiency

Within the corridor, US Routes 136 and 24, and IL Routes 9, 41, 78, 95, 97, and 116 provide the major access for the residential, commercial, and farm operations. These are two-lane highways with varying width shoulders. There are numerous locations where horizontal and vertical curves require no passing zones and speed restrictions. The existing routes provide unrestricted access to residences, fields, and commercial sites, and are also intersected by side roads at frequent intervals. There are 16 high accident locations on 2-lane highways within the study area.

Travel speed and safety are affected by the traffic entering and exiting the highway. Travel time is further affected by farm equipment using the highway. The proposed IL 336 would provide improved travel times and safety between Macomb, Canton, and Peoria. A new facility would improve vertical and horizontal alignments, provide passing lanes, and reduce vehicle conflicts at intersections, railroad crossings, and access points.

Reduced Speed through Towns and Villages. There are several different routes between Macomb and Peoria, a distance of approximately 60 miles. Each of these routes goes through 10 to 15 towns and villages. Travel speeds are reduced in each one of these locations, significantly adding to the travel time between Macomb and Peoria. These numerous speed reductions and delays also add to safety and enforcement concerns in these communities.

Truck Traffic. As the percentage of potentially slower moving trucks increases, delays in travel also increase, particularly on two-lane rural highways. Along the two-lane highways where safe passing zones are limited, safety will also be impacted. Within the study area, portions of US 24, US 136, IL 116, IL 41, and IL 9 have truck percentages as high as 20%.

Existing Traffic. Annual average daily traffic (AADT) volumes available from 2002 indicate that traffic volumes vary significantly throughout the corridor, with highest volumes near Peoria, and the next highest concentration of traffic around Macomb. In this review, to determine the need for a four-lane highway, two-lane facilities with an AADT over 8,000 were noted. Improvements are already underway along US 24 from Peoria to Banner. A four-lane section would be justified along Illinois Route 116 between Peoria and Hanna City where existing volumes are around 9,000 AADT. Volumes along Illinois Route 116 between Hanna City and Farmington are currently approaching 8,000 AADT.

2.3 ADJUSTMENTS TO CORRIDORS

In the initial stages of the project, modifications were made to the 1970 corridors, primarily to accommodate development that has occurred in the study area. In addition, some adjustments were made to avoid existing communities and to incorporate alignments of nearby state or US routes. The 1970 corridors are shown in Exhibit 1-3 and the adjusted corridors that were evaluated in detail are shown in Exhibit 2-2.¹ The rationale for the adjustments is discussed in detail in Section 4.

¹ Note that the termini for the corridors shown in Exhibit 1-3 were actually adjusted slightly from the 1970 corridors, to provide logical termini. In the 1970s, I-474 did not exist, and the corridors ended at various points in the western part of Peoria. On the west side of the study area, Corridors B and C originally terminated at Tennessee, Illinois. On Exhibit 1-3, the segments west of US 67 were deleted. With the current highway improvements discussed in Section 2.2.1, Tennessee is no longer a logical terminus, but US 67 is.